

BOOK VIII: THE FLASHING OF THE HANDJAR

PRIVATE MEMORANDUM OF THE MEETING OF VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL, HELD AT THE STATE HOUSE OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 1907. (Written by Cristoferos, Scribe of the Council, by instruction of those present.)

When the private meeting of various Members of the National Council had assembled in the Council Hall of the State House at Plazac, it was as a preliminary decided unanimously that now or hereafter no names of those present were to be mentioned, and that officials appointed for the purposes of this meeting should be designated by office only, the names of all being withheld.

The proceedings assumed the shape of a general conversation, quite informal, and therefore not to be recorded. The nett outcome was the unanimous expression of an opinion that the time, long contemplated by very many persons throughout the nation, had now come when the Constitution and machinery of the State should be changed; that the present form of ruling by an Irregular Council was not sufficient, and that a method more in accord with the spirit of the times should be adopted. To this end Constitutional Monarchy, such as that holding in Great Britain, seemed best adapted. Finally, it was decided that each Member of the Council should make a personal canvass of his district, talk over the matter with his electors, and bring back to another meeting—or, rather, as it was amended, to this meeting postponed for a week, until September 2nd—the opinions and wishes received. Before separating, the individual to be appointed King, in case the new idea should prove grateful to the nation, was discussed. The consensus of opinion was entirely to the effect that the Voivode Peter Vissarion should, if he would accept the high office, be appointed. It was urged that, as his daughter, the Voivodin Teuta, was now married to the Englishman, Rupert Sent Leger—called generally by the mountaineers “the Gospodar Rupert”—a successor to follow the Voivode when God should call him would be at hand—a successor worthy in every way to succeed to so illustrious a post. It was urged by several speakers, with general acquiescence, that already Mr. Sent Leger’s services to the State were such that he would be in himself a worthy person to begin the new Dynasty; but that, as he was now allied to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, it was becoming that the elder, born of the nation, should receive the first honour.

THE SAME—Continued.

The adjourned meeting of certain members of the National Council was resumed in the Hall of the State House at Plazac on Monday, September 2nd, 1907. By motion the same chairman was appointed, and the rule regarding the record renewed.

Reports were made by the various members of the Council in turn, according to the State Roll. Every district was represented. The reports were unanimously in favour of the New Constitution, and it was reported by each and all of the Councillors that the utmost enthusiasm marked in every case the suggestion of the Voivode Peter Vissarion as the first King to be crowned under the new Constitution, and that remainder should be settled on the Gospodar Rupert (the mountaineers would only receive his lawful name as an alternative; one and all said that he would be “Rupert” to them and to the nation—for ever).

The above matter having been satisfactorily settled, it was decided that a formal meeting of the National Council should be held at the State House, Plazac, in one week from to-day, and that

the Voivode Peter Vissarion should be asked to be in the State House in readiness to attend. It was also decided that instruction should be given to the High Court of National Law to prepare and have ready, in skeleton form, a rescript of the New Constitution to be adopted, the same to be founded on the Constitution and Procedure of Great Britain, so far as the same may be applicable to the traditional ideas of free Government in the Land of the Blue Mountains.

By unanimous vote this private and irregular meeting of "Various National Councillors" was then dissolved.

RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE LAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, HELD AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1907, TO CONSIDER THE ADOPTION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION, AND TO GIVE PERMANENT EFFECT TO THE SAME IF, AND WHEN, DECIDED UPON. (Kept by the Monk Cristoferos, Scribe to the National Council.)

The adjourned meeting duly took place as arranged. There was a full attendance of Members of the Council, together with the Vladika, the Archbishop, the Archimandrites of Spazac, of Ispazar, of Domitan, and Astrag; the Chancellor; the Lord of the Exchequer; the President of the High Court of National Law; the President of the Council of Justice; and such other high officials as it is customary to summon to meetings of the National Council on occasions of great importance. The names of all present will be found in the full report, wherein are given the ipsissima verba of the various utterances made during the consideration of the questions discussed, the same having been taken down in shorthand by the humble scribe of this precis, which has been made for the convenience of Members of the Council and others.

The Voivode Peter Vissarion, obedient to the request of the Council, was in attendance at the State House, waiting in the "Chamber of the High Officers" until such time as he should be asked to come before the Council.

The President put before the National Council the matter of the new Constitution, outlining the headings of it as drawn up by the High Court of National Law, and the Constitution having been formally accepted *nem. con.* by the National Council on behalf of the people, he proposed that the Crown should be offered to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, with remainder to the "Gospodar Rupert" (legally, Rupert Sent Leger), husband of his only child, the Voivodin Teuta. This also was received with enthusiasm, and passed *nem. con.*

Thereupon the President of Council, the Archbishop, and the Vladika, acting together as a deputation, went to pray the attention of the Voivode Peter Vassarion.

When the Voivode entered, the whole Council and officials stood up, and for a few seconds waited in respectful silence with heads bowed down. Then, as if by a common impulse—for no word was spoken nor any signal given—they all drew their handjars, and stood to attention—with points raised and edges of the handjars to the front.

The Voivode stood very still. He seemed much moved, but controlled himself admirably. The only time when he seemed to lose his self-control was when, once again with a strange simultaneity, all present raised their handjars on high, and shouted: "Hail, Peter, King!" Then lowering their points till these almost touched the ground, they once again stood with bowed heads.

When he had quite mastered himself, the Voivode Peter Vissarion spoke:

"How can I, my brothers, sufficiently thank you, and, through you, the people of the Blue Mountains, for the honour done to me this day? In very truth it is not possible, and therefore I

pray you to consider it as done, measuring my gratitude in the greatness of your own hearts. Such honour as you offer to me is not contemplated by any man in whose mind a wholesome sanity rules, nor is it even the dream of fervent imagination. So great is it, that I pray you, men with hearts and minds like my own, to extend to me, as a further measure of your generosity, a little time to think it over. I shall not want long, for even already, with the blaze of honour fresh upon me, I see the cool shadow of Duty, though his substance is yet hardly visible. Give me but an hour of solitude—an hour at most—if it do not prolong this your session unduly. It may be that a lesser time will serve, but in any case I promise you that, when I can see a just and fitting issue to my thought, I shall at once return.”

The President of the Council looked around him, and, seeing everywhere the bowing heads of acquiescence, spoke with a reverent gravity:

“We shall wait in patience whatsoever time you will, and may the God who rules all worthy hearts guide you to His Will!”

And so in silence the Voivode passed out of the hall.

From my seat near a window I could watch him go, as with measured steps he passed up the hill which rises behind the State House, and disappeared into the shadow of the forest. Then my work claimed me, for I wished to record the proceedings so far whilst all was fresh in my mind. In silence, as of the dead, the Council waited, no man challenging opinion of his neighbour even by a glance.

Almost a full hour had elapsed when the Voivode came again to the Council, moving with slow and stately gravity, as has always been his wont since age began to hamper the movement which in youth had been so notable. The Members of the Council all stood up uncovered, and so remained while he made announcement of his conclusion. He spoke slowly; and as his answer was to be a valued record of this Land and its Race, I wrote down every word as uttered, leaving here and there space for description or comment, which spaces I have since then filled in.

“Lords of the National Council, Archbishop, Vladika, Lords of the Council of Justice and of National Law, Archimandrites, and my brothers all, I have, since I left you, held in the solitude of the forest counsel with myself—and with God; and He, in His gracious wisdom, has led my thinking to that conclusion which was from the first moment of knowledge of your intent presaged in my heart. Brothers, you know—or else a long life has been spent in vain—that my heart and mind are all for the nation—my experience, my life, my handjar. And when all is for her, why should I shrink to exercise on her behalf my riper judgment though the same should have to combat my own ambition? For ten centuries my race has not failed in its duty. Ages ago the men of that time trusted in the hands of my ancestors the Kingship, even as now you, their children, trust me. But to me it would be base to betray that trust, even by the smallest tittle. That would I do were I to take the honour of the crown which you have tendered to me, so long as there is another more worthy to wear it. Were there none other, I should place myself in your hands, and yield myself over to blind obedience of your desires. But such an one there is; dear to you already by his own deeds, now doubly dear to me, since he is my son by my daughter’s love. He is young, whereas I am old. He is strong and brave and true; but my days of the usefulness of strength and bravery are over. For myself, I have long contemplated as the crown of my later years a quiet life in one of our monasteries, where I can still watch the whirl of the world around us on your behalf, and be a counsellor of younger men of more active minds. Brothers, we are entering on stirring times. I can see the signs of their coming all around us. North and South—the Old Order and the New, are about to clash, and we lie between the opposing forces. True it is that the Turk, after warring for a thousand years, is fading into insignificance. But from the

North where conquests spring, have crept towards our Balkans the men of a mightier composite Power. Their march has been steady; and as they came, they fortified every step of the way. Now they are hard upon us, and are already beginning to swallow up the regions that we have helped to win from the dominion of Mahound. The Austrian is at our very gates. Beaten back by the Irredentists of Italy, she has so enmeshed herself with the Great Powers of Europe that she seems for the moment to be impregnable to a foe of our stature. There is but one hope for us—the uniting of the Balkan forces to turn a masterly front to North and West as well as to South and East. Is that a task for old hands to undertake? No; the hands must be young and supple; and the brain subtle, as well as the heart be strong, of whomsoever would dare such an accomplishment. Should I accept the crown, it would only postpone the doing of that which must ultimately be done. What avail would it be if, when the darkness closes over me, my daughter should be Queen Consort to the first King of a new dynasty? You know this man, and from your record I learn that you are already willing to have him as King to follow me. Why not begin with him? He comes of a great nation, wherein the principle of freedom is a vital principle that quickens all things. That nation has more than once shown to us its friendliness; and doubtless the very fact that an Englishman would become our King, and could carry into our Government the spirit and customs which have made his own country great, would do much to restore the old friendship, and even to create a new one, which would in times of trouble bring British fleets to our waters, and British bayonets to support our own handjars. It is within my own knowledge, though as yet unannounced to you, that Rupert Sent Leger has already obtained a patent, signed by the King of England himself, allowing him to be denaturalized in England, so that he can at once apply for naturalization here. I know also that he has brought hither a vast fortune, by aid of which he is beginning to strengthen our hands for war, in case that sad eventuality should arise. Witness his late ordering to be built nine other warships of the class that has already done such effective service in overthrowing the Turk—or the pirate, whichever he may have been. He has undertaken the defence of the Blue Mouth at his own cost in a way which will make it stronger than Gibraltar, and secure us against whatever use to which the Austrian may apply the vast forces already gathered in the Bocche di Cattaro. He is already founding aerial stations on our highest peaks for use of the war aeroplanes which are being built for him. It is such a man as this who makes a nation great; and right sure I am that in his hands this splendid land and our noble, freedom-loving people will flourish and become a power in the world. Then, brothers, let me, as one to whom this nation and its history and its future are dear, ask you to give to the husband of my daughter the honour which you would confer on me. For her I can speak as well as for myself. She shall suffer nothing in dignity either. Were I indeed King, she, as my daughter, would be a Princess of the world. As it will be, she shall be companion and Queen of a great King, and her race, which is mine, shall flourish in all the lustre of the new Dynasty.

“Therefore on all accounts, my brothers, for the sake of our dear Land of the Blue Mountains, make the Gospodar Rupert, who has so proved himself, your King. And make me happy in my retirement to the cloister.”

When the Voivode ceased to speak, all still remained silent and standing. But there was no mistaking their acquiescence in his most generous prayer. The President of the Council well interpreted the general wish when he said:

“Lords of the National Council, Archbishop, Vladika, Lords of the Councils of Justice and National Law, Archimandrites, and all who are present, is it agreed that we prepare at leisure a fitting reply to the Voivode Peter of the historic House of Vissarion, stating our agreement with his wish?”

To which there was a unanimous answer:

“It is.” He went on:

“Further. Shall we ask the Gospodar Rupert of the House of Sent Leger, allied through his marriage to the Voivodin Teuta, daughter and only child of the Voivode Peter of Vissarion, to come hither to-morrow? And that, when he is amongst us, we confer on him the Crown and Kingship of the Land of the Blue Mountains?”

Again came the answer: “It is.”

But this time it rang out like the sound of a gigantic trumpet, and the handjars flashed.

Whereupon the session was adjourned for the space of a day.

THE SAME—Continued. September 10, 1907.

When the National Council met to-day the Voivode Peter Vissarion sat with them, but well back, so that at first his presence was hardly noticeable. After the necessary preliminaries had been gone through, they requested the presence of the Gospodar Rupert—Mr. Rupert Sent Leger—who was reported as waiting in the “Chamber of the High Officers.” He at once accompanied back to the Hall the deputation sent to conduct him. As he made his appearance in the doorway the Councillors stood up. There was a burst of enthusiasm, and the handjars flashed. For an instant he stood silent, with lifted hand, as though indicating that he wished to speak. So soon as this was recognized, silence fell on the assembly, and he spoke:

“I pray you, may the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion, who has accompanied me hither, appear with me to hear your wishes?” There was an immediate and enthusiastic acquiescence, and, after bowing his thanks, he retired to conduct her.

Her appearance was received with an ovation similar to that given to Gospodar Rupert, to which she bowed with dignified sweetness. She, with her husband, was conducted to the top of the Hall by the President, who came down to escort them. In the meantime another chair had been placed beside that prepared for the Gospodar, and these two sat.

The President then made the formal statement conveying to the “Gospodar Rupert” the wishes of the Council, on behalf of the nation, to offer to him the Crown and Kingship of the Land of the Blue Mountains. The message was couched in almost the same words as had been used the previous day in making the offer to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, only differing to meet the special circumstances. The Gospodar Rupert listened in grave silence. The whole thing was manifestly quite new to him, but he preserved a self-control wonderful under the circumstances. When, having been made aware of the previous offer to the Voivode and the declared wish of the latter, he rose to speak, there was stillness in the Hall. He commenced with a few broken words of thanks; then he grew suddenly and strangely calm as he went on:

“But before I can even attempt to make a fitting reply, I should know if it is contemplated to join with me in this great honour my dear wife the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion, who has so splendidly proved her worthiness to hold any place in the government of the Land. I fain would . . .”

He was interrupted by the Voivodin, who, standing up beside him and holding his left arm, said:

“Do not, President, and Lords all, think me wanting in that respect of a wife for husband which in the Blue Mountains we hold so dear, if I venture to interrupt my lord. I am here, not merely as a wife, but as Voivodin of Vissarion, and by the memory of all the noble women of that noble line I feel constrained to a great duty. We women of Vissarion, in all the history of centuries,

have never put ourselves forward in rivalry of our lords. Well I know that my own dear lord will forgive me as wife if I err; but I speak to you, the Council of the nation, from another ground and with another tongue. My lord does not, I fear, know as you do, and as I do too, that of old, in the history of this Land, when Kingship was existent, that it was ruled by that law of masculine supremacy which, centuries after, became known as the Lex Salica. Lords of the Council of the Blue Mountains, I am a wife of the Blue Mountains—as a wife young as yet, but with the blood of forty generations of loyal women in my veins. And it would ill become me, whom my husband honours—wife to the man whom you would honour—to take a part in changing the ancient custom which has been held in honour for all the thousand years, which is the glory of Blue Mountain womanhood. What an example such would be in an age when self-seeking women of other nations seek to forget their womanhood in the struggle to vie in equality with men! Men of the Blue Mountains, I speak for our women when I say that we hold of greatest price the glory of our men. To be their companions is our happiness; to be their wives is the completion of our lives; to be mothers of their children is our share of the glory that is theirs.

“Therefore, I pray you, men of the Blue Mountains, let me but be as any other wife in our land, equal to them in domestic happiness, which is our woman’s sphere; and if that priceless honour may be vouchsafed to me, and I be worthy and able to bear it, an exemplar of woman’s rectitude.” With a low, modest, graceful bow, she sat down.

There was no doubt as to the reception of her renunciation of Queenly dignity. There was more honour to her in the quick, fierce shout which arose, and the unanimous upward swing of the handjars, than in the wearing of any crown which could adorn the head of woman.

The spontaneous action of the Gospodar Rupert was another source of joy to all—a fitting corollary to what had gone before. He rose to his feet, and, taking his wife in his arms, kissed her before all. Then they sat down, with their chairs close, bashfully holding hands like a pair of lovers.

Then Rupert arose—he is Rupert now; no lesser name is on the lips of his people henceforth. With an intense earnestness which seemed to glow in his face, he said simply:

“What can I say except that I am in all ways, now and for ever, obedient to your wishes?” Then, raising his handjar and holding it before him, he kissed the hilt, saying:

“Hereby I swear to be honest and just—to be, God helping me, such a King as you would wish—in so far as the strength is given me. Amen.”

This ended the business of the Session, and the Council showed unmeasured delight. Again and again the handjars flashed, as the cheers rose “three times three” in British fashion.

When Rupert—I am told I must not write him down as “King Rupert” until after the formal crowning, which is ordained for Wednesday, October 16th,—and Teuta had withdrawn, the Voivode Peter Vissarion, the President and Council conferred in committee with the Presidents of the High Courts of National Law and of Justice as to the formalities to be observed in the crowning of the King, and of the formal notification to be given to foreign Powers. These proceedings kept them far into the night.

FROM “The London Messenger.” CORONATION FESTIVITIES OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS. (From our Special Correspondent.) PLAZAC,

October 14, 1907.

As I sat down to a poorly-equipped luncheon-table on board the Austro-Orient liner Franz Joseph, I mourned in my heart (and I may say incidentally in other portions of my internal economy) the comfort and gastronomic luxury of the King and Emperor Hotel at Trieste. A brief

comparison between the menus of to-day's lunch and yesterday's will afford to the reader a striking object-lesson:

Trieste.	Steamer.
Eggs a la cocotte.	Scrambled eggs on toast.
Stewed chicken, with paprika.	Cold chicken.
Devilled slices of Westphalian ham (boiled in wine).	Cold ham.
Tunny fish, pickled.	Bismarck herrings.
Rice, burst in cream.	Stewed apples.
Guava jelly.	Swiss cheese.

Consequence: Yesterday I was well and happy, and looked forward to a good night's sleep, which came off. To-day I am dull and heavy, also restless, and I am convinced that at sleeping-time my liver will have it all its own way.

The journey to Ragusa, and thence to Plazac, is writ large with a pigment of misery on at least one human heart. Let a silence fall upon it! In such wise only can Justice and Mercy join hands.

Plazac is a miserable place. There is not a decent hotel in it. It was perhaps on this account that the new King, Rupert, had erected for the alleged convenience of his guests of the Press a series of large temporary hotels, such as were in evidence at the St. Louis Exposition. Here each guest was given a room to himself, somewhat after the nature of the cribs in a Rowton house. From my first night in it I am able to speak from experience of the sufferings of a prisoner of the third class. I am, however, bound to say that the dining and reception rooms were, though uncomfortably plain, adequate for temporary use. Happily we shall not have to endure many more meals here, as to-morrow we all dine with the King in the State House; and as the cuisine is under the control of that cordon bleu, Gaston de Faux Pas, who so long controlled the gastronomic (we might almost say Gastonomic) destinies of the Rois des Diamants in the Place Vendome, we may, I think, look forward to not going to bed hungry. Indeed, the anticipations formed from a survey of our meagre sleeping accommodation were not realized at dinnertime to-night. To our intense astonishment, an excellent dinner was served, though, to be sure, the cold dishes predominated (a thing I always find bad for one's liver). Just as we were finishing, the King (nominated) came amongst us in quite an informal way, and, having bidden us a hearty welcome, asked that we should drink a glass of wine together. This we did in an excellent (if rather sweet) glass of Cliquot '93. King Rupert (nominated) then asked us to resume our seats. He walked between the tables, now and again recognizing some journalistic friend whom he had met early in life in his days of adventure. The men spoken to seemed vastly pleased—with themselves probably. Pretty bad form of them, I call it! For myself, I was glad I had not previously met him in the same casual way, as it saved me from what I should have felt a humiliation—the being patronized in that public way by a prospective King who had not (in a Court sense) been born. The writer, who is by profession a barrister-at-law, is satisfied at being himself a county gentleman and heir to an historic estate in the ancient county of Salop, which can boast a larger population than the Land of the Blue Mountains.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—We must ask our readers to pardon the report in yesterday's paper sent from Plazac. The writer was not on our regular staff, but asked to be allowed to write the report, as he was a kinsman of King Rupert of the Blue Mountains, and would therefore be in a position

to obtain special information and facilities of description “from inside,” as he puts it. On reading the paper, we cabled his recall; we cabled also, in case he did not obey, to have his ejection effected forthwith.

We have also cabled Mr. Mordred Booth, the well-known correspondent, who was, to our knowledge, in Plazac for his own purposes, to send us full (and proper) details. We take it our readers will prefer a graphic account of the ceremony to a farrago of cheap menus, comments on his own liver, and a belittling of an Englishman of such noble character and achievements that a rising nation has chosen him for their King, and one whom our own nation loves to honour. We shall not, of course, mention our abortive correspondent’s name, unless compelled thereto by any future utterance of his.

FROM “The London Messenger.” THE CORONATION OF KING RUPERT OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS. (By our Special Correspondent, Mordred Booth.) PLAZAC,

October 17, 1907.

Plazac does not boast of a cathedral or any church of sufficient dimensions for a coronation ceremony on an adequate scale. It was therefore decided by the National Council, with the consent of the King, that it should be held at the old church of St. Sava at Vissarion—the former home of the Queen. Accordingly, arrangements had been made to bring thither on the warships on the morning of the coronation the whole of the nation’s guests. In St. Sava’s the religious ceremony would take place, after which there would be a banquet in the Castle of Vissarion. The guests would then return on the warships to Plazac, where would be held what is called here the “National Coronation.”

In the Land of the Blue Mountains it was customary in the old days, when there were Kings, to have two ceremonies—one carried out by the official head of the national Church, the Greek Church; the other by the people in a ritual adopted by themselves, on much the same basis as the Germanic Folk-Moot. The Blue Mountains is a nation of strangely loyal tendencies. What was a thousand years ago is to be to-day—so far, of course, as is possible under the altered condition of things.

The church of St. Sava is very old and very beautiful, built in the manner of old Greek churches, full of monuments of bygone worthies of the Blue Mountains. But, of course, neither it nor the ceremony held in it to-day can compare in splendour with certain other ceremonials—for instance, the coronation of the penultimate Czar in Moscow, of Alfonso XII. in Madrid, of Carlos I. in Lisbon.

The church was arranged much after the fashion of Westminster Abbey for the coronation of King Edward VII., though, of course, not so many persons present, nor so much individual splendour. Indeed, the number of those present, outside those officially concerned and the Press of the world, was very few.

The most striking figure present—next to King Rupert, who is seven feet high and a magnificent man—was the Queen Consort, Teuta. She sat in front of a small gallery erected for the purpose just opposite the throne. She is a strikingly beautiful woman, tall and finely-formed, with jet-black hair and eyes like black diamonds, but with the unique quality that there are stars in them which seem to take varied colour according to each strong emotion. But it was not even her beauty or the stars in her eyes which drew the first glance of all. These details showed on scrutiny, but from afar off the attractive point was her dress. Surely never before did woman, be she Queen or peasant, wear such a costume on a festive occasion.

She was dressed in a white Shroud, and in that only. I had heard something of the story which goes behind that strange costume, and shall later on send it to you.¹

When the procession entered the church through the great western door, the national song of the Blue Mountains, "Guide our feet through darkness, O Jehovah," was sung by an unseen choir, in which the organ, supplemented by martial instruments, joined. The Archbishop was robed in readiness before the altar, and close around him stood the Archimandrites of the four great monasteries. The Vladika stood in front of the Members of the National Council. A little to one side of this body was a group of high officials, Presidents of the Councils of National Law and Justice, the Chancellor, etc.—all in splendid robes of great antiquity—the High Marshall of the Forces and the Lord high Admiral.

When all was ready for the ceremonial act of coronation, the Archbishop raised his hand, whereupon the music ceased. Turning around, so that he faced the Queen, who thereon stood up, the King drew his handjar and saluted her in Blue Mountain fashion—the point raised as high possible, and then dropped down till it almost touches the ground. Every man in the church, ecclesiastics and all, wear the handjar, and, following the King by the interval of a second, their weapons flashed out. There was something symbolic, as well as touching, in this truly royal salute, led by the King. His handjar is a mighty blade, and held high in the hands of a man of his stature, it overtowered everything in the church. It was an inspiring sight. No one who saw will ever forget that noble flashing of blades in the thousand-year-old salute . . .

The coronation was short, simple, and impressive. Rupert knelt whilst the Archbishop, after a short, fervent prayer, placed on his head the bronze crown of the first King of the Blue Mountains, Peter. This was handed to him by the Vladika, to whom it was brought from the National Treasury by a procession of the high officers. A blessing of the new King and his Queen Teuta concluded the ceremony. Rupert's first act on rising from his knees was to draw his handjar and salute his people.

After the ceremony in St. Sava, the procession was reformed, and took its way to the Castle of Vissarion, which is some distance off across a picturesque creek, bounded on either side by noble cliffs of vast height. The King led the way, the Queen walking with him and holding his hand . . . The Castle of Vissarion is of great antiquity, and picturesque beyond belief. I am sending later on, as a special article, a description of it . . .

The "Coronation Feast," as it was called on the menu, was held in the Great Hall, which is of noble proportions. I enclose copy of the menu, as our readers may wish to know something of the details of such a feast in this part of the world.

One feature of the banquet was specially noticeable. As the National Officials were guests of the King and Queen, they were waited on and served by the King and Queen in person. The rest of the guests, including us of the Press, were served by the King's household, not the servants—none of that cult were visible—but by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court.

There was only one toast, and that was given by the King, all standing: "The Land of the Blue Mountains, and may we all do our duty to the Land we love!" Before drinking, his mighty handjar flashed out again, and in an instant every table at which the Blue Mountaineers sat was ringed with flashing steel. I may add parenthetically that the handjar is essentially the national weapon. I do not know if the Blue Mountaineers take it to bed with them, but they certainly wear it everywhere else. Its drawing seems to emphasize everything in national life . . .

¹ EDITORIAL NOTE—We shall, in our issue of Saturday week, give a full record of the romantic story of Queen Teuta and her Shroud, written by Mr. Mordred Booth, and illustrated by our special artist, Mr. Neillison Browne, who is Mr. Booth's artistic collaborateur in the account of King Rupert's Coronation.

We embarked again on the warships—one a huge, steel-plated Dreadnought, up to date in every particular, the other an armoured yacht most complete in every way, and of unique speed. The King and Queen, the Lords of the Council, together with the various high ecclesiastics and great officials, went on the yacht, which the Lord High Admiral, a man of remarkably masterful physiognomy, himself steered. The rest of those present at the Coronation came on the warship. The latter went fast, but the yacht showed her heels all the way. However, the King's party waited in the dock in the Blue Mouth. From this a new cable-line took us all to the State House at Plazac. Here the procession was reformed, and wound its way to a bare hill in the immediate vicinity. The King and Queen—the King still wearing the ancient bronze crown with which the Archbishop had invested him at St. Sava's—the Archbishop, the Vladika, and the four Archimandrites stood together at the top of the hill, the King and Queen being, of course, in the front. A courteous young gentleman, to whom I had been accredited at the beginning of the day—all guests were so attended—explained to me that, as this was the national as opposed to the religious ceremony, the Vladika, who is the official representative of the laity, took command here. The ecclesiastics were put prominently forward, simply out of courtesy, in obedience to the wish of the people, by whom they were all greatly beloved.

Then commenced another unique ceremony, which, indeed, might well find a place in our Western countries. As far as ever we could see were masses of men roughly grouped, not in any uniform, but all in national costume, and armed only with the handjar. In the front of each of these groups or bodies stood the National Councillor for that district, distinguishable by his official robe and chain. There were in all seventeen of these bodies. These were unequal in numbers, some of them predominating enormously over others, as, indeed, might be expected in so mountainous a country. In all there were present, I was told, over a hundred thousand men. So far as I can judge from long experience of looking at great bodies of men, the estimate was a just one. I was a little surprised to see so many, for the population of the Blue Mountains is never accredited in books of geography as a large one. When I made inquiry as to how the frontier guard was being for the time maintained, I was told:

“By the women mainly. But, all the same, we have also a male guard which covers the whole frontier except that to seaward. Each man has with him six women, so that the whole line is unbroken. Moreover, sir, you must bear in mind that in the Blue Mountains our women are trained to arms as well as our men—ay, and they could give a good account of themselves, too, against any foe that should assail us. Our history shows what women can do in defence. I tell you, the Turkish population would be bigger to-day but for the women who on our frontier fought of old for defence of their homes!”

“No wonder this nation has kept her freedom for a thousand years!” I said.

At a signal given by the President of the National Council one of the Divisions moved forwards. It was not an ordinary movement, but an intense rush made with all the elan and vigour of hardy and highly-trained men. They came on, not merely at the double, but as if delivering an attack. Handjar in hand, they rushed forward. I can only compare their rush to an artillery charge or to an attack of massed cavalry battalions. It was my fortune to see the former at Magenta and the latter at Sadowa, so that I know what such illustration means. I may also say that I saw the relief column which Roberts organized rush through a town on its way to relieve Mafeking; and no one who had the delight of seeing that inspiring progress of a flying army on their way to relieve their comrades needs to be told what a rush of armed men can be. With speed which was simply desperate they ran up the hill, and, circling to the left, made a ring round the topmost plateau, where stood the King. When the ring was complete, the stream went on lapping round

and round till the whole tally was exhausted. In the meantime another Division had followed, its leader joining close behind the end of the first. Then came another and another. An unbroken line circled and circled round the hill in seeming endless array, till the whole slopes were massed with moving men, dark in colour, and with countless glittering points everywhere. When the whole of the Divisions had thus surrounded the King, there was a moment's hush—a silence so still that it almost seemed as if Nature stood still also. We who looked on were almost afraid to breathe.

Then suddenly, without, so far as I could see, any fogleman or word of command, the handjars of all that mighty array of men flashed upward as one, and like thunder pealed the National cry:

“The Blue Mountains and Duty!”

After the cry there was a strange subsidence which made the onlooker rub his eyes. It seemed as though the whole mass of fighting men had partially sunk into the ground. Then the splendid truth burst upon us—the whole nation was kneeling at the feet of their chosen King, who stood upright.

Another moment of silence, as King Rupert, taking off his crown, held it up in his left hand, and, holding his great handjar high in his right, cried in a voice so strong that it came ringing over that serried mass like a trumpet:

“To Freedom of our Nation, and to Freedom within it, I dedicate these and myself. I swear!”

So saying, he, too, sank on his knees, whilst we all instinctively uncovered.

The silence which followed lasted several seconds; then, without a sign, as though one and all acted instinctively, the whole body stood up. Thereupon was executed a movement which, with all my experience of soldiers and war, I never saw equalled—not with the Russian Royal Guard saluting the Czar at his Coronation, not with an impi of Cetewayo's Zulus whirling through the opening of a kraal.

For a second or two the whole mass seemed to writhe or shudder, and then, lo! the whole District Divisions were massed again in completeness, its Councillors next the King, and the Divisions radiating outwards down the hill like wedges.

This completed the ceremony, and everything broke up into units. Later, I was told by my official friend that the King's last movement—the oath as he sank to his knees—was an innovation of his own. All I can say is, if, in the future, and for all time, it is not taken for a precedent, and made an important part of the Patriotic Coronation ceremony, the Blue Mountaineers will prove themselves to be a much more stupid people than they seem at present to be.

The conclusion of the Coronation festivities was a time of unalloyed joy. It was the banquet given to the King and Queen by the nation; the guests of the nation were included in the royal party. It was a unique ceremony. Fancy a picnic-party of a hundred thousand persons, nearly all men. There must have been made beforehand vast and elaborate preparations, ramifying through the whole nation. Each section had brought provisions sufficient for their own consumption in addition to several special dishes for the guest-tables; but the contribution of each section was not consumed by its own members.

It was evidently a part of the scheme that all should derive from a common stock, so that the feeling of brotherhood and common property should be preserved in this monumental fashion.

The guest-tables were the only tables to be seen. The bulk of the feasters sat on the ground. The tables were brought forward by the men themselves—no such thing as domestic service was known on this day—from a wood close at hand, where they and the chairs had been placed in readiness. The linen and crockery used had been sent for the purpose from the households of

every town and village. The flowers were plucked in the mountains early that morning by the children, and the gold and silver plate used for adornment were supplied from the churches. Each dish at the guest-tables was served by the men of each section in turn.

Over the whole array seemed to be spread an atmosphere of joyousness, of peace, of brotherhood. It would be impossible to adequately describe that amazing scene, a whole nation of splendid men surrounding their new King and Queen, loving to honour and serve them. Scattered about through that vast crowd were groups of musicians, chosen from amongst themselves. The space covered by this titanic picnic was so vast that there were few spots from which you could hear music proceeding from different quarters.

After dinner we all sat and smoked; the music became rather vocal than instrumental—indeed, presently we did not hear the sound of any instrument at all. Only knowing a few words of Balkan, I could not follow the meanings of the songs, but I gathered that they were all legendary or historical. To those who could understand, as I was informed by my tutelary young friend, who stayed beside me the whole of this memorable day, we were listening to the history of the Land of the Blue Mountains in ballad form. Somewhere or other throughout that vast concourse each notable record of ten centuries was being told to eager ears.

It was now late in the day. Slowly the sun had been dropping down over the Calabrian Mountains, and the glamorous twilight was stealing over the immediate scene. No one seemed to notice the coming of the dark, which stole down on us with an unspeakable mystery. For long we sat still, the clatter of many tongues becoming stilled into the witchery of the scene. Lower the sun sank, till only the ruddiness of the afterglow lit the expanse with rosy light; then this failed in turn, and the night shut down quickly.

At last, when we could just discern the faces close to us, a simultaneous movement began. Lights began to flash out in places all over the hillside. At first these seemed as tiny as glow-worms seen in a summer wood, but by degrees they grew till the space was set with little circles of light. These in turn grew and grew in both number and strength. Flames began to leap out from piles of wood, torches were lighted and held high. Then the music began again, softly at first, but then louder as the musicians began to gather to the centre, where sat the King and Queen. The music was wild and semi-barbaric, but full of sweet melody. It somehow seemed to bring before us a distant past; one and all, according to the strength of our imagination and the volume of our knowledge, saw episodes and phases of bygone history come before us. There was a wonderful rhythmic, almost choric, force in the time kept, which made it almost impossible to sit still. It was an invitation to the dance such as I had never before heard in any nation or at any time. Then the lights began to gather round. Once more the mountaineers took something of the same formation as at the crowning. Where the royal party sat was a level mead, with crisp, short grass, and round it what one might well call the Ring of the Nation was formed.

The music grew louder. Each mountaineer who had not a lit torch already lighted one, and the whole rising hillside was a glory of light. The Queen rose, and the King an instant after. As they rose men stepped forward and carried away their chairs, or rather thrones. The Queen gave the King her hand—this is, it seems, the privilege of the wife as distinguished from any other woman. Their feet took the time of the music, and they moved into the centre of the ring.

That dance was another thing to remember, won from the haunting memories of that strange day. At first the King and Queen danced all alone. They began with stately movement, but as the music quickened their feet kept time, and the swing of their bodies with movements kept growing more and more ecstatic at every beat till, in true Balkan fashion, the dance became a very agony of passionate movement.

At this point the music slowed down again, and the mountaineers began to join in the dance. At first slowly, one by one, they joined in, the Vladika and the higher priests leading; then everywhere the whole vast crowd began to dance, till the earth around us seemed to shake. The lights quivered, flickered, blazed out again, and rose and fell as that hundred thousand men, each holding a torch, rose and fell with the rhythm of the dance. Quicker, quicker grew the music, faster grew the rushing and pounding of the feet, till the whole nation seemed now in an ecstasy.

I stood near the Vladika, and in the midst of this final wildness I saw him draw from his belt a short, thin flute; then he put it to his lips and blew a single note—a fierce, sharp note, which pierced the volume of sound more surely than would the thunder of a cannon-shot. On the instant everywhere each man put his torch under his foot.

There was complete and immediate darkness, for the fires, which had by now fallen low, had evidently been trodden out in the measure of the dance. The music still kept in its rhythmic beat, but slower than it had yet been. Little by little this beat was pointed and emphasized by the clapping of hands—at first only a few, but spreading till everyone present was beating hands to the slow music in the darkness. This lasted a little while, during which, looking round, I noticed a faint light beginning to steal up behind the hills. The moon was rising.

Again there came a note from the Vladika's flute—a single note, sweet and subtle, which I can only compare with a note from a nightingale, vastly increased in powers. It, too, won through the thunder of the hand-claps, and on the second the sound ceased. The sudden stillness, together with the darkness, was so impressive that we could almost hear our hearts beating. And then came through the darkness the most beautiful and impressive sound heard yet. That mighty concourse, without fugleman of any sort, began, in low, fervent voice, to sing the National Anthem. At first it was of so low tone as to convey the idea of a mighty assembly of violinists playing with the mutes on. But it gradually rose till the air above us seemed to throb and quiver. Each syllable—each word—spoken in unison by the vast throng was as clearly enunciated as though spoken by a single voice:

“Guide our feet through darkness, O Jehovah.”

This anthem, sung out of full hearts, remains on our minds as the last perfection of a perfect day. For myself, I am not ashamed to own that it made me weep like a child. Indeed, I cannot write of it now as I would; it unmans me so!

* * *

In the early morning, whilst the mountains were still rather grey than blue, the cable-line took us to the Blue Mouth, where we embarked in the King's yacht, *The Lady*, which took us across the Adriatic at a pace which I had hitherto considered impossible. The King and Queen came to the landing to see us off. They stood together at the right-hand side of the red-carpeted gangway, and shook hands with each guest as he went on board. The instant the last passenger had stepped on deck the gangway was withdrawn. The Lord High Admiral, who stood on the bridge, raised his hand, and we swept towards the mouth of the gulf. Of course, all hats were off, and we cheered frantically. I can truly say that if King Rupert and Queen Teuta should ever wish to found in the Blue Mountains a colony of diplomatists and journalists, those who were their guests on this great occasion will volunteer to a man. I think old Hempetch, who is the doyen of English-speaking journalists, voiced our sentiments when he said: “May God bless them and theirs with every grace and happiness, and send prosperity to the Land and the rule!” I think the King and Queen heard us cheer, they turned to look at our flying ship again.